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# RENUNCIATION IN THE RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS OF SOUTH ASIA

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Most anthropologists who have carried out fieldwork in south Asia have focused their attention either on the village as a locality or on caste as an institution. In consequence, anthropological theories of Hindu asceticism have been based, for the most part, on perceptions of ascetics from the point of view of the world which they have renounced. Moreover, anthropological recourse to indological texts has merely confirmed the bias of fieldworking anthropologists, for most comments on the social aspects of renunciation have been derived from the prescriptive texts which were compiled by Brahman householders, or possibly eremitic householders, but not by renouncing ascetics. In this article I analyse the Brahman householder's construction of asceticism in order to demonstrate its partiality as a basis of anthropological investigation and then analyse renunciation from the ascetic's point of view. Of particular importance is the way in which the ascetic translates his temporal preoccupations in social terms and the implication of such translation for the ascetic's relations with non-ascetics, with the other ascetics of his sect, and with the ascetics of other sects.

One of the most comprehensive theories of Indian religion was proposed by Dumont (1959; 1966: 235–7) some twenty-five years ago. Starting from the position that caste is the most fundamental and most specifically Hindu institution of Hindu society, Dumont investigated the presence of renouncers in south Asia in their relation to the caste system. This relation was conceived in terms of an opposition between those men who live in the functionally interdependent world of caste and those individuals who quit the social world in order to liberate themselves from the bonds of transient existence.

The most striking concomitance [of the caste system] is constituted by the existence within the caste system and beside the caste system of an institution which contradicts it. In renunciation a man becomes dead to the social world, escapes the network of interdependent caste relationships . . . and becomes an end for himself, as in western social theory, on the condition that he is cut off from ordinary social life. That is why I have called this person, this renouncer, an individual-outside-the-world (1966: 235).

Dumont added that the renouncer does not, in fact, leave society, for he subsists on alms and preaches to householders. Nevertheless the renouncer quits his place in society, becomes symbolically dead to the social world, and adopts a role which is both universal and personal vis-à-vis the social world. For Dumont the significance of this universal role lies with his further observation that the great religious and speculative movements of south Asia were led by individuals-outside-the-world, whereas the Brahman, as the most excellent man-in-the-world, has played a conservative role in absorbing the innovations of the

renouncer. For Dumont the emergence of the religion which we call Hinduism is a consequence of this dialogue between the renouncer and the Brahman householder.

The appearance of Dumont's structuralist theory was remarkable at the time, given the absence of published ethnographic data on renunciation, an absence which probably also accounts for the continuing critical acceptance of the theory. Yet Dumont himself recognised (1966: 234, 237) its inadequate empirical basis and admitted that he was only able to sketch in rough the relationship between the renouncer and the Brahman householder. There is now material at hand to examine the adequacy of Dumont's general formulation. This material suggests that no simple dichotomy can describe the relation between Brahman householder and renouncer, for these two persons situate themselves in different conceptual universes—the Brahman householder in an organic universe and the ascetic in a temporal one. Since each person sees the other through the terms of reference of his own world, their interrelations can be described only by considering their different perceptions of the events in which they interact. Dumont, in observing that the renouncer quits the social world of caste, has investigated asceticism from the point of view of the Brahman householder. There is nothing wrong in analysing asceticism from this point of view, but it must be recognised that the non-ascetic's point of view is different from that of the ascetic and by itself cannot serve as an adequate framework for the analysis of renunciation. In this essay I analyse the Brahman householder's construction of asceticism in order to demonstrate its partiality as a basis of anthropological investigation and then analyse asceticism from the ascetic's temporal point of view. To be sure, by points of view I mean the way in which events are interpreted in terms of certain conceptual universes. On the ground the same individual, be he Brahman householder or ascetic, may recognise both points of view and find no contradiction between them. The anthropologist, however, must also recognise this diversity; for it is only by considering the relations between these two points of view that the topic of renunciation in the religious traditions of south Asia can be adequately investigated.

*The Brahman householder's view of the relation between the householder and ascetic*

I begin by examining from the Brahman householder's point of view the relation between the ascetic and the householder living in caste society. Dumont presents this as an opposition between the man-in-the-world and the individual-outside-the-world. The sources from which Dumont derived his theory are the Brahmanical codes of conduct (*śāstra*), but the actual terms of the opposition were formulated by compounding Weber's distinction between worldly and otherworldly with the differences between Brahman and renouncer and between the interdependence of caste and the individual (1966: 235, n.92). Dumont is not always clear whether he is describing a logical opposition (picked up by Das 1977: 46–9) or an ideological opposition (Dumont 1966: 192), and in analysing the transformations of this relationship Dumont abandons structuralism altogether and resorts to vague analogies of the physical and biological sciences—Brahmans 'absorb' renouncers (1966: 335) and sects 'degenerate' into

castes (1966: 238). When this ambiguity in his concept of opposition is clarified, Dumont's opposition between the Brahman householder and renouncer gains in accuracy but betrays its partiality as a Brahman's construction of renunciation. I base my criticism of Dumont on the very same Brahmanical sources to which he had recourse.

Dumont's theory of renunciation (as well as his theory of caste) is derived from the *varṇāśrama* model of society; that is to say, the 'caste and life-stage' model whereby society is divided into four ranked castes (*varṇa*), the upper three of which are entitled to pass through four life-stages (*āśrama*). According to this organic model, society was constituted at the dawn of time by Brahma from whose mouth, arms, thighs and feet sprang the Brahmans, the warriors, the herders and tillers, and the servants. These four castes were differentiated according to their function at the sacrifice. Brahmans effectuated the sacrifice by pronouncing their ritual formulae; the king (as the warrior *par excellence*) offered the oblation; herders and tillers provided the oblation; and servants served the participants outside the sacrificial arena. When each caste performed its appointed function at the sacrifice, society—as a manifestation of Brahma—perpetuated itself as a whole. The entitlement of the Brahmans, the warriors, and the herders and tillers to participate in the sacrifice was derived from their Twice-born status. This status was attained at adolescence by virtue of an initiation, likened to a second birth, at which time the youth acquired a sacred thread and the right to participate in the sacrifice. Only Twice-born castes were entitled to pass through the four stages of life: student, householder, eremitic householder and ascetic. The first of these life-stages began not with birth from the womb but rebirth in sacrifice; that is to say, at the time of acquiring the sacred thread and the status of the Twice-born.

One can see here why Dumont calls the householder a 'man-in-the-world', for the moral unit in this model is the universal social organism. A person does not have an individual existence; rather he exists as a part which performs a function in a functionally interdependent system. Only in renunciation does the individual abandon his function and become an end in himself. It is important to note, however, that this Brahmanical model is a ritual model of the universe cast in terms of social categories; it is not a sociological model of society cast in terms of universal categories. By 'universe' one means here the worlds which are a manifestation of Brahma, or what one might call the totality of ordered time and space. Outside this ritual universe were not only barbarians and evil spirits living in areas of darkness but also certain ascetics, such as the Jains and Buddhists, organised into religious traditions which did not recognise the ritual authority of the Brahmans. These ascetics from rival traditions proposed their own classifications of the social universe which differed in certain respects from the caste and life-stage model. Thus one may analyse the caste and life-stage model as a Brahmanical model of the proto-Hindu universe; or even as a model of what has been called more recently 'Hindu society', but still one cannot attribute to this model a givenness or fundamentality separate from the intentions of those persons who compiled and perpetuated it.<sup>1</sup>

Keeping in mind, therefore, that the view of asceticism which is about to unfold is that of the non-ascetic (presumably a Brahman householder or eremitic

householder), let us consider the life-stages of the caste and life-stage model of the universe. The initial interpretation of the life-stage classification is of four life-stages—student, householder, eremitic householder and ascetic—through which the pious Twice-born (in some texts only the Brahman) passes in the course of earthly life. The first three stages of the Twice-born or Brahman succeed one another as phases in the life of a householder. At the student stage, the Brahman youth is rendered fit to become a householder. As a householder the Brahman performs sacrifices, studies the Vedas and manages his family and estate. In the stage of the forest hermit he takes his wife and sacrificial fire to the forest and lives there as an eremitic householder. In the final stage of asceticism the forest hermit sends his wife home, abandons the sacrificial fire and goes forth to the realisation of Brahma. The Brahmanical codes of conduct appear to be ambivalent in their evaluation of the final life stage. In *Manu* certain passages proclaim asceticism as the greatest stage of life (*Manu* 6.96), yet in other passages the householder is said to be superior to the student, hermit and ascetic because these three life-stages are all supported by and protected by the householder (*Manu* 6.89). Moreover, it is written that the householder who performs the ritual duties of his life-stage will eventually be united with Brahma (*Manu* 6.93). In sum, both Brahman householder and ascetic of Brahman birth attain Brahma; the difference between these two categories lies with the fact that the ascetic attains Brahma in his lifetime; the Brahman householder attains Brahma at the end of his present or future lives. Thus far one might say that the caste and life-stage model includes a distinction between Twice-born householder and ascetic of Twice-born birth conceived in terms of a relation of negation (home/homeless) and a relation of sequence (eventual attainment of Brahma/immediate attainment of Brahma).

This interpretation of the four life-stages internally divided by a distinction between Twice-born householder and ascetic of Twice-born birth is only partially accurate in that the final transition from the eremitic householder stage to the ascetic stage conceals a relation of encompassment, whereby the ascetic includes within his body the entire caste and life-stage organism of society. In 'going forth' to Brahma in the final stage the ascetic does not really abandon the performance of sacrifice; rather he interiorises the performance of sacrifice. It is by virtue of his interiorisation of the householder's sacrifice that the ascetic encompasses the caste and life-stage manifestation of Brahma. This relation of encompassment may be demonstrated with reference to the Brahmanical doctrine of the three debts. Prior to renouncing the transient world, the candidate ascetic must have previously discharged three debts which all Brahmans incur by virtue of having been born of Brahman parents: the debt to the sages (*ṛṣirṇa*), the debt to the ancestors (*pitṛṇa*) and the debt to the gods (*devaṇa*). The Brahman householder is able to discharge these debts only because he has been previously rendered fit for the task by having passed through a series of sixteen rites of passage (*samskāra*). These sixteen rituals include the Brahman boy's rebirth and investiture with the sacred thread, his education at his preceptor's hermitage and his marriage which marks the end of his studentship. During the householder stage of life the Brahman redeems the three debts. Having been invested with the sacred thread, the householder maintains the

sacrificial fire within the home thereby discharging his debt to the gods. Having acquired his education, he becomes knowledgeable in the Vedas and thereby discharges his debt to the sages. Having been offered a maiden in marriage, he begets sons and thereby discharges his debt to the ancestors (*Manu* 4.257; 6.35–37).

According to the Brahmanical codes of conduct the candidate ascetic must repay his debts to the sages, ancestors and gods before going forth in renunciation to Brahma (*Manu* 6.35–37). In his renunciation, however, the ascetic does not abandon the continuing repayment of these debts; rather he interiorises the means by which he repays them. Instead of sending his semen downward to beget sons who will secure the safe passage and immortality of their parents in the ancestral world, the ascetic stores up his seed, controls his senses, and practises austerities in order to burn away the sins of many lifetimes and thereby attain immortality. Instead of studying the Vedas, the ascetic by virtue of his reunion with Brahma is said to become a living manifestation of the Vedas. Instead of offering sacrifices to the gods, the ascetic gives away his property as a sacrificial fee and reposites the sacrificial fire within himself (*Manu* 6.38) so that his entire body becomes a sacrifice to the soul. Thus the ascetic quits his family and estate and interiorises the means by which the Brahman discharges his three debts and in this way becomes reunited with Brahma from whose cosmic body the social order of the four castes sprang forth. By virtue of his renunciation the ascetic does not stand outside the social universe (as Dumont would have it); instead the entire social universe in its unmanifested and pre-manifested state stands inside him. The ascetic is Brahma.<sup>2</sup> In sum, the social universe is a manifestation of the everpresent Brahma and in renouncing his household and interiorising the sacrifice, the Twice-born ascetic, like Brahma, is seen to encompass the social world. Here one finds hierarchical relations of difference in which the ascetic of Twice-born birth is autonomous and eternal and thereby greater than the Twice-born householder who is dependent and transient. This hierarchical relation overlaps the distinction between the ascetic as the performer of interior sacrifices and the Twice-born householder as the performer of exterior sacrifices.

Certain passages in the Brahmanical codes of conduct celebrate the householder as the greatest life-stage because the householder supports and protects the other three life-stages. However, there is some ambivalence here. Transience depends upon eternity yet the ascetic depends upon the householder for his subsistence. The Brahmins who compiled the codes of conduct seem to have worked out a compromise. The ascetic depends upon the householder for food and clothing, but the householder is not obliged to give alms to the ascetic and the ascetic is instructed to accept such alms with indifference (*Manu* 6.57). Furthermore the ascetic should accept only useless things in alms; that is to say, food and clothes for which the householder has no further use. The ascetic is enjoined by *Manu* (6.56) to go to the householder for food only 'when no smoke ascends [from the kitchen], when the pestle lies motionless, when the embers have been extinguished, when the people have finished their meal, when the remnants in the dishes have been removed'. As for the ascetic's clothing, he must wear worn-out garments of householders and his alms bowl must be a

broken portion of an earthenware pot (*Manu* 6.44). Any householder who provides for another's food and clothing is superior to that other person, for that other person is seen to depend upon the householder. In giving alms, however, it is the recipient, not the donor, who is superior because the recipient uses his gift for a sacred purpose.<sup>3</sup> By stipulating that the ascetic receive only useless food and clothing from the householder, the ascetic is divested of the material attachments which bind the householder to the universe. Thus one might add here the distinction between supporter and supported in which the Twice-born householder is superior to the ascetic of Twice-born birth and the distinction between recipient of useless things for a sacred purpose and donor of useless things for a sacred purpose in which the ascetic is superior to the householder.<sup>4</sup>

Given the overall complexity of the relation between the householder and ascetic of Twice-born birth, one must ask to what extent it is useful to describe this relation in terms of opposition. The term itself cannot account for the specific character of each elementary distinction—negation, interiorisation, encompassment, sequence. One can find, however, in this summary of relations several oppositions of a logical type—that is to say oppositions composed of two symmetrical terms mediated by a third term which subsumes the opposition at a higher level of inclusiveness. Examples of these oppositions include: exterior performance of sacrifice/interior performance of sacrifice; eventual attainment of Brahma/immediate attainment of Brahma. Both oppositions are symmetrical as well as mediated by the third term Brahman (or Twice-born).<sup>5</sup> Thus the compilers of the Brahmanical codes of conduct, by making asceticism the final stage in the life of the Twice-born, created a logical opposition between householder and houseless ascetic and then asserted their superiority by transcending this opposition at the meta-level. Of course, the relationship between householder and ascetic is not simply one of logical opposition. In so far as Brahmans and ascetics comprise rival religious careers then there exists an ideological opposition between Brahman and ascetic. Following Wilden (1980: 414, 509–11, etc.), I note that ideological oppositions, unlike logical ones, need not be composed of symmetrical terms nor mediated by a third position. In so far as this ideological opposition is present (and I emphasise that it is not present in all cases) then the Brahmanical claim of primacy over the ascetic is based upon the exclusion of non-Twice-born householders or non-Brahmans from asceticism and upon the formulation of an opposition between ascetic and some second term (in this case householder) which can be mediated by the category Brahman. In brief, the Brahman claims ideological primacy over the ascetic by finding the third term. This ideological claim entails that the Brahman should not be in logical opposition with the ascetic.<sup>6</sup>

The adequacy of the caste and life-stage model as a description of asceticism depends, therefore, upon the ascetic's agreement to stand opposed to the category of householder and to be subsumed by the category of Brahman. One might ask what would happen if the ascetic reconceived his relationship with the social universe in such a way that he was not opposed to the category of householder or that the Brahman could not find the third term. This question is not hypothetical for, indeed, over the last two and a half millennia leaders of certain sectarian traditions have reclassified social relations in the transient world

so as to derecognise or neutralise the house/houseless distinction and to prevent the Brahman as Brahman from mediating the opposition of ascetic/non-ascetic. The extent to which ascetic sects have developed outside the confines of the caste and life-stage model may be appreciated by referring to fig. 1. The categories of house/houseless and caste/casteless along the parameters of the diagram indicate that we are still looking at renunciation with householderlike preoccupations. That is to say, the sects in the upper right box do not necessarily recognise the opposition house/houseless and the sects in the lower right box do not recognise the opposition caste/casteless. Furthermore the sects in the lower part of the lower left box recognise the category of caste but adopt an entirely neutral attitude towards it with reference to their sectarian recruitment. In the upper left box are found the Brahmanical 'men-in-the-world' and in the lower left box the Brahmanical 'individuals-outside-the-world'. The presence of ascetic sects on the right side of the diagram confirms that ascetics have not necessarily respected the logical distinctions upon which the Brahman based his ideological primacy over the ascetic. Furthermore the presence of ascetic sects in the same upper left-hand box as the 'men-in-the-world' demonstrates that Brahman householder and ascetic or caste and sect need not contradict one another. Taken altogether, the presence of sects in the three boxes from which according to Dumont's formulation, they should be absent points to the fact that Dumont's theory of renunciation in Indian society is not a theory about renunciators but an observation about Brahmanical theorising.<sup>7</sup> Any theory of renunciation in south Asia based solely on the view of the Brahman householder will necessarily be inadequate. Instead an analytical framework is needed which takes this point of view into account but which adds to it the ascetic's point of view.

*The ascetic's view of the relation between the ascetic and non-ascetic*

One implication of analysing renunciation from the point of view of the world which is renounced is that one overlooks the entire field of intersectorian relations which, for the ascetic, may be a more important arena of discourse than his relationship with non-ascetics.<sup>8</sup> For example, the Buddha, upon attaining enlightenment, preached his first sermon not to householders but to a group of rival ascetics (*Mahavagga* 1.1-6); and Sankaracarya, Madhvacarya and Gorakhnath, the legendary founders of the Dasnami Sannyasis, Madhvacaryas and Kanphata Yogis are said to have travelled throughout the Indian subcontinent engaging the leaders of rival sects in verbal duels and yogic battles (Sarkar n.d.: 4-16; Aiyer & Rau n.d.: 25-49; Briggs 1938: 228-250). Intersectorian rivalry between Muslim fakirs, Saivite Sannyasis and Vaishnavite Bairagis achieved institutional form during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries with the establishment of militant orders and 'victory processions' of itinerant ascetics (Farquhar 1925; Lorenzen 1978; Burghart 1983a). In the armed battles fought between these rival groups thousands of ascetics lost their lives. Not all sects were diminished by physical loss. At the turn of the eighteenth century the ascetic followers of Ramanuja virtually disappeared from upper India simply by reclassifying themselves retroactively as Ramanandis (Burghart 1978; 1983b). In brief, although there is no doubt that ascetics have recruited 'men-in-the-



Caste		Casteless	
House	<div><div><div>‘Man-in-the-world’ -----</div><div>Lingayats (<i>pancaryana</i>)</div><div>Endogamous traditions:*</div><div>Vallabhis</div><div>Radhavallabhis</div><div>Gauriyas (<i>gosvami</i>)</div><div>Madhvacaryas</div><div>Ramanuji <i>vadagalais</i> (1300)</div><div>Castes of ‘fallen’ ascetics:</div><div>Sannyasis -----</div><div>Yogis -----</div><div>Gauriyas (<i>jat bairagi</i>)</div><div>Modern ‘societies’:</div><div>Arya samaj</div><div>Brahmo samaj</div></div><div>‘fallen’ ascetics</div></div>	Rai Dasis Garib Dasis Siva Narayanis Sattanamis‡	House
	<div><div>Caste criterion of recruitment:</div><div>‘Individual-outside-the-world’</div><div>Vedic Brahmanical <i>sannyasin</i></div><div>Lingayats (<i>virakta</i>)</div><div>Dasnami Sannyasis -----</div><div>Kanphata Yogis -----</div><div>Nimbarkis*†</div><div>Caste rules within the sect:</div><div>Ramanandis (after 1700) -----</div><div>Ramanuji <i>temgalais</i> (1300)</div><div>Jesuits (before 1744)</div><div>Kabir Panthis†‡</div><div>Dadu Panthis†‡</div></div>	Buddhists (early period) Ajivikas Ramanandis (before 1700) Capucins Jesuits (after 1744)	
Caste		Casteless	

★ These Brahmanical traditions have celibate renouncers and may allow partial participation in the sect by non-Brahmans.  
† These sects have celibate and householder branches.  
‡ These sects have caste and casteless branches.

Figure 1. South Asian sectarian movements in relation to caste and household.

world’ to their sects, nevertheless sectarian bards as well as the ascetics themselves remember intersectarian encounters as of primary importance in the formation and perpetuation of their sects.

In analysing this intersectarian discourse concerning the most effective, most appropriate or only path of liberation, one finds that release from the transient world (*sam̐sara*) is both the purpose of the individual act of renunciation as well as the promise of the preceptors of the various ascetic sects. The transient world, however, is not coterminous with the social world and various sects have understood or differently emphasised the way in which the transient world is

sustained and hence the way in which the individual's relationship with it can be severed (see Piatigorsky in press for the proto-Hindu period).<sup>9</sup> Thus Dumont's observation that the renouncer quits the social world of his family and caste—while being in some sense accurate in terms of the Brahmanical caste and life-stage model—is not at all generally true from the ascetic's point of view, for different sects have different rules concerning which social relationships must be severed in order to obtain release from transience. Ramanandis believe that in order to attain the unconditioned state of eternity the individual must become desireless and this necessitates that he undertake a vow of celibacy and leave his family. Kabir Panthis, however, distinguish between a vow of celibacy and a vow of sexual abstinence. The latter vow, they claim, is sufficient to attain the desireless state and therefore they do not renounce their family, but instead maintain what they call 'celibacy in marriage'. These vows and rituals serve to define from a sectarian point of view the criteria of being a 'real' ascetic. In the absence of universal agreement of these criteria, sects which do not respect the criteria of rival sects may find themselves classified as non-ascetics by their rivals. Thus in spite of what the Kabir Panthis think of themselves, the Ramanandis do not consider them to be ascetics because they continue to live in households. (One might also bear in mind that from the Brahman householder's point of view 'low caste' Kabir Panthis are not 'real' ascetics, for they lack the caste entitlement of renunciation.) From the Kabir Panthi's point of view, however, the house/houseless distinction does not overlap the non-ascetic/ascetic distinction; and therefore they take an entirely neutral attitude towards the Ramanandi preoccupation of separation from householders.

In sum, in the intersectarian discourse concerning the nature of transience some ascetics might find themselves classified by others as 'householders', householders as 'ascetics', and indeed the very category of householder might be neutralised so that it no longer stands in any specific relation to ascetic.<sup>10</sup> Thus the only general statement which one can make concerning asceticism in the religious traditions of south Asia is that all ascetics see themselves as followers of some path which releases them from the transient world (*not* the social world) and that all ascetics distinguish themselves from non-ascetics who do not seek such release. The criteria must be specified in each case, for one sect does not necessarily accept the criteria of other sects.

The way in which the relation between ascetic and non-ascetic is constituted by the ascetic may be illustrated with reference to my field data on the Ramanandis, a Vaishnavite sect which, according to the Ramanandis, was founded during the fourteenth century by the saint Swami Ramanand. Ramanandis worship Lord Ram, known in Hindu chronicles as the seventh incarnation of Vishnu but revered by the Ramanandis themselves as a form of the Supreme Soul. For the Ramanandis transience is sustained by desire; release from the transient world—conceived as eternal reunion with Ram—is attained by those who are desireless. Hence Ramanandis call themselves Bairagi, or the Desireless, and they follow a variety of spiritual paths leading to the desireless state. The pursuit of this religious goal obliges Ramanandis to separate themselves from householders, for they believe that the houses and hearths of householders are permeated with desire. Upon receiving initiation from his

*guru*, a Ramanandi no longer sleeps in a house, nor does he accept any cooked food from householders, including his parents, if that food has been cooked upon a householder's hearth. The difference between the desireless Ramanandis and the desirous householders is often expressed by the Ramanandis in terms of their respective modes of perpetuation: Ramanandis perpetuate themselves by spiritual initiation; householders by sexual procreation. These vows and rules signify to the houseless Ramanandi that he is separate from and superior to the non-ascetic householder.

Ramanandis take, however, an entirely neutral attitude towards caste. It will be recalled that in the caste and life-stage model renunciation entails the interiorisation of sacrifice. For this reason only Twice-born householders—as performers of exterior sacrifices—were entitled to become renouncers and perform interior sacrifices. Ramanandis believe, however, that the transient world is sustained by desire and that the attainment of the desireless state brings about the eternal reunion of the embodied soul of the ascetic with the Supreme Soul of Lord Ram. Since liberation entails the union of souls, not of bodies or minds, renunciation is an entitlement of all embodied souls, Twice-born men as well as women, members of servant and Untouchable castes, and even non-Hindus. In the Ramanandi initiation the candidate does not interiorise the sacrifice; instead he forges a personal relationship with his redeemer Lord Ram and by virtue of this relationship is able to discover the unity of embodied soul and supreme soul, of worshipper and worshipped.

Open recruitment to the sect does not mean that Ramanandis ignore caste relations. Instead they claim that one's mind and body are formed of one's caste, and since the soul dwells within one's mind and body until death, caste rules of commensality must be observed within the sect. For this reason Ramanandis of male Twice-born body do not accept 'imperfect' (*kaccā*) food or initiation from Ramanandis of Once-born body. Even the Ramanandi Renouncers and Great Renouncers (see below) who dress in bark, roam in itinerant monasteries and smear ashes on their body observe caste rules of commensality amongst themselves. The fact that for the Ramanandis caste is a matter of bodies and minds, not of social organisation, is further evidenced by the way in which a Ramanandi politely inquires into the caste of his fellow ascetic—not by asking him his caste (*āp kā jāti kyā hai?*) but by asking about the identity of his body (*āp kā śarīr kyā hai?*).

Apart from the observance of caste rules of commensality within the sect, Ramanandis have very little to do with caste. All Ramanandis, upon initiation, abandon the performance of their customary caste duties, for they now claim to be in the service of Lord Ram, not of other men. Because celibate Ramanandis entertain no commensal or connubial relations with householders, they are unaffected by the householder's preoccupation with caste. Moreover, if a celibate Ramanandi, acting under his *guru's* order, reverts to householder status then he is usually re-accepted into the regional sub-caste of his birth because his caste status, being unrenounceable, was never renounced. In sum, the Ramanandis do not reinterpret caste in the manner of the early Buddhists (see n. 1), nor do they interiorise it in the manner of the Brahmanical *śamnyāsin*, nor do they recognise it in the manner of the Vadagalai Ramanujis (Rangachari 1931: 34–8;

113–14), but instead neutralise it with reference to liberation by claiming that caste is merely a matter of bodies and minds which has no bearing on the union of souls. To return to the caste and life-stage model one can see that in the Ramanandi case the distinction between ‘householder’ (which for the Ramanandis includes ascetics, such as the Kabir Panthis, who have neutralised the distinction between house/houseless) and houseless ‘ascetics’ (which includes ascetics, such as the Dasnami Sannyasis, who take a vow of celibacy) is preserved, but by having no caste criterion of recruitment the category of Brahman no longer mediates this distinction.

*The ascetic's view of the relation between the different ascetics of his sect*

Renunciation of the transient world does not merely serve to distinguish Ramanandis from householders. The distinction between eternity and transience is translated into categories of the social world in different ways by different ascetics and these differences become a highly significant means by which ascetics represent their intrasectarian relations. Many of the large ascetic sects in south Asia are internally differentiated into branches according to the type of spiritual discipline practised by the members of the branch. Certain types of spiritual discipline are thought by their practitioners to entail a further stage in the renunciation of transience or a closer degree of reunion with eternity and hence the practitioners often rank their branch in relation to other ones so that one might refer to these branches more accurately as grades. In some cases these grades may be conceived as differences in entitlement. The Nimbarkis and Ramanujis distinguish between members with Twice-born bodies and those with Once-born bodies (Crawford 1981; Rangachari 1931). Or the grades may be conceived as differences in attainment. The Dasnami Sannyasis are divided into Dandi and Paramahansa branches with the Paramahansa claiming to be at such a high level of knowledge that they need not observe certain customary rules of the sect which are observed by the Dandis (Ghurye 1964: 72–3; Sinha & Sarasvati 1978: 68–82). The members of a so-called inferior grade, however, do not necessarily accept the criteria by which their inferiority is evaluated so that the ranking of branches is often a matter of some disagreement within the sect.<sup>11</sup>

Among Ramanandis the notion of differential spiritual achievement exists, but there is no agreement within the sect concerning the criteria by which such differences are to be assessed, or indeed that such differences are at all relevant for the sect's social organisation. Disagreement focuses mainly on claims within the sect concerning the value of the disciplines of devotion and renunciation. Devotion and renunciation are not necessarily mutually exclusive religious attitudes yet in so far as they entail separate programmes of the self they are divergent, and the separate organisation of each spiritual discipline obliges the ascetic to consider these options as being mutually exclusive paths. The followers of each path recognise the value of the other, yet they evaluate the other path on their own terms, not its own terms, and thereby downgrade it, thinking their own path is a more effective means of liberation and thereby associating the ascetics of the lesser grade with transient existence. I describe

these intrasectarian differences among the Ramanandis first with reference to the discipline of devotion and then to the discipline of renunciation.

The commitment to the devotional path is undertaken in the course of a secondary initiation in which the *guru* discloses to the disciple the mysteries of the eternal play of Lord Ram, the tutelary deity of the Ramanandi sect, and bestows upon the disciple either a courtly identity, such as Ram's servant, or a kinship identity, such as Ram's younger brother or his wife's younger sister (a man may express his devotion through a woman's role; I never heard, however, of a case in which a female ascetic enacted a man's role). By means of this initiation the disciple gains entry to Ram's celestial kingdom and forms a personal relationship with his tutelary deity through which he expresses his devotion. Most devotional Ramanandis live in local rent-receiving or mendicant hermitages, which they liken to bowers within the celestial palace of Lord Ram. The devotional ascetics may or may not have their hair shaved but for the topknot. They wear a cotton loincloth, and they wrap around their bodies at the chest or the hips a large sheet of white or yellow cotton or silk fabric known as an *acalā*. *Acalā* means motionless and stands in opposition to restlessness, a characteristic of the mental life of householders, that is to say of anyone whose mind is influenced by desire.

The candidate for the devotional path does not, strictly speaking, choose his courtly or kin identity; rather the bestowal of a particular identity is thought to be an outcome of the grace of the *guru* as well as of the candidate's own inclinations (*bhāva*) for a particular identity. Nearly all Ramanandis who follow the devotional path in fact adopt a fictive kin rather than courtly identity, which makes them either a brother or sister of Ram or of Ram's wife Sita. Some devotional ascetics rank the various kin and courtly identities in terms of a continuum of social distance from their redeemer Ram. The ascetics who take themselves to be the younger sisters of the wife of Ram claim that their relationship is especially close to Ram because at night the younger sisters of the wife may sleep in the same room as their elder sister and brother-in-law and may even participate in the erotic play which precedes the union of the cosmic couple. At this time of night, other fictive kin and affines of Ram must remain outside the divine bedchamber and endure separation from their Lord. As for the servants and guards of Ram, they find themselves at an even greater distance from the domestic quarters of the divine family. Finally all celibate ascetics of non-Vaishnavite sects find themselves, according to this scheme, classified together with non-Vaishnavite householders outside the court of Lord Ram.

Not all Ramanandis follow the path of devotion and those who have opted for the path of renunciation do not undergo the secondary initiation of the devotional path. Thus they do not receive in any formal way a kin or courtly identity through which to express their devotion to Ram. They do, however, bear the name Das, meaning servant or slave, and they regard themselves as servants of Lord Ram in the present Kali Age. From the point of view of the devotional ascetics, therefore, those Ramanandis who follow the path of renunciation are servants of Ram who, perforce, are more distant from their Lord than the followers of the devotional path who worship Ram through a kinship identity. Since this blissful union of Ram and his earthly devotee is an

eternal experience, devotional ascetics claim that Ramanandis who follow the devotional path are a higher grade of ascetic than those who follow the path of renunciation.

Ramanandi ascetics on the path of renunciation see themselves, however, in a different light. They embark upon this path in the course of a secondary initiation in which the *guru* bestows upon the disciple a handful of purificatory ashes. Henceforth the ascetic smears his body twice daily with ashes and attains liberation by means of various techniques of *yoga* seen by the ascetic to comprise a sacrifice of the body to the soul. Such ascetics usually let their hair grow long and wear nothing but a cotton loincloth which, strictly speaking, is not a garment (*bastra*). Ramanandis who follow the path of renunciation may lead either an itinerant or sedentary existence. They call themselves Tyagi, literally Renouncer, and they call the devotional ascetics not by their devotional discipline but by the fact that the devotional ascetics wear clothes; that is to say, they call the devotional ascetics *Bastra Dhari* or Wearers of Garments. Furthermore the near-naked Renouncers smear their bodies twice daily with ashes which render the body impervious to influences from the transient world. The implication here is that Wearers of Garments, who do not smear ashes on their limbs, are still susceptible to influences of the transient world. For the Renouncers the bestowal of ashes is a further stage of renunciation which creates a relation of difference between them and the so-called Wearers of Garments. It follows from their greater renunciation of the transient world that the Ramanandis who follow the path of renunciation are superior to the devotional ascetic.

Among Ramanandi Renouncers is another group of ascetics who call themselves Great Renouncers (*mahātyāgī*). Great Renouncers, like Renouncers, have long hair and smear ashes on their bodies but they renounce altogether the use of woven or stitched fabric. Unlike Renouncers, Great Renouncers fashion their loincloths out of the inner bark of the banana tree, or braid it from a sacred variety of grass (*mūñja*), or carve it from a piece of wood or assemble it from an iron plate and a length of chain. Great Renouncers wander perpetually in itinerant monasteries (which is optional for Renouncers) and sleep out in the open. Only during the rainy season do they seek shelter on a veranda, or in a three-walled hostel, but never within an enclosed room. Great Renouncers assert their superiority over Renouncers, Wearers of Garments and householders in terms of their itinerant movement, said to be a visible representation (*rūpa*) of the circulation of the Supreme Soul within the mind-born universe. Thus the Great Renouncers see themselves as an icon of liberation in the transient world (Burghart 1983a).

From the point of view of the followers of the path of renunciation these intrasectarian differences express a dualistic vision of the universe conceived in terms of the encompassment of transience by the everpresent Supreme Soul. Separation is achieved by finding the meta-term which classes together the rival branches of Ramanandis with householders and then by making this meta-term into the second term to which one at this meta-level is opposed. One's own term and the second term are then evaluated according to a code of renunciation in order to assert the superiority of the former over the latter. For example, the fact

that Wearers of Garments live in local mendicant or rent-receiving hermitages (*kuṭī*, *āśrama*) separates them from householders who live in homes (*ghar*). The Renouncers and Great Renouncers take the sedentary nature of Wearers of Garments to be the meta-term which classes them together with householders and then they make this meta-term into the second term to which on this meta-level they oppose their own itinerant way of life. Since the Renouncers and Great Renouncers understand their wandering to be a sign of liberation, they then associate the sedentary devotional Ramanandis in their local hermitages and the sedentary householders in their homes with transient existence. Of course, the Renouncers are not in complete opposition to the Wearers of Garments. In spite of this intrasectarian difference in the type of monastery, all Ramanandis live in a monastery which serves to signify their common houseless status and their opposition to householders. If all Ramanandis did not share a few insignia in opposition to householders, then these transformations of insignia would indicate the absence of a relation within the sect rather than a hierarchical one. Without some similarity there would not be any point in making a difference.

*The ascetic's view of the relation between the ascetics of different sects*

Different sects apprehend differently the way in which transience pervades both social and physical existence and hence the way in which the ascetic, by severing certain social or physical relationships, can free himself from the transient world. Ascetic rules, vows and rituals of severance serve to differentiate ascetics from non-ascetics; these rules vows and rituals also serve to differentiate the ascetics themselves, for in renouncing different apprehensions of transience, relations of difference are created between sects. These intersectorian differences, like the intrasectarian ones, are often expressed by sectarian customary behaviour and insignia (Tambiah 1970: 62–76; Das in press). Nearly all ascetics wear a loincloth night and day as a sign of their celibate status, but the actual form of the loincloth may vary from sect to sect. The Brahmanical *saṃnyāsin* was enjoined by *Manu* (6.44) to wear a loincloth of cast-off clothing. In this case the adoption of useless clothes signified the ascetic's indifference to the attachments of the transient world of householders. Ramanandi Great Renouncers, however, wear a loincloth fashioned from the inner bark of the banana tree thereby signifying that they are outside the domestic world maintained by sacrifice in which woven but unstitched cotton garments are appropriate. Aghori Panthis wear a loincloth made from a strip of shroud signifying that they live in a permanent state of death unlike the transformable state of death of transient householders (Parry in press with comments by Piatigorsky in press). Meanwhile the naked Dasnami Nagas have 'internalised' their loincloth thereby distinguishing themselves from both householders without loincloths as well as other ascetics with external loincloths and hence demonstrating their ability to move freely between transience and eternity. All four loincloths—rag, shroud, bark, internal—similarly represent the negation of transience yet each loincloth stands in a relation of difference to the others by being opposed to different ascetic perceptions of the form of transience. For the ascetic, renunciation of

different forms of transience is as much a means of separating himself from non-ascetics as it is of differentiating himself from other ascetics.

Although sectarian vows, rituals and insignia may serve to differentiate ascetics, still these differences are not necessarily sect specific. For example, the insignia and ritual practices of the modern Aghori Panthis—who dwell on the cremation ground, use a human skull for a begging bowl and eat the flesh of human corpses—are virtually identical with the fifth-century Kapalika ascetics. Not only do different sects have identical insignia, but members of the same sect, such as the Dasnami Sannyasis, may be divided into separate branches each possessing its own insignia. A sect may resort to rules of commensality to define intersectorian boundaries (for example, Vallabhites do not accept ‘imperfect’ food from Kanphata Yogis), but the avoidance of commensal relations may also serve to define intrasectionary boundaries (for example, devotional and renunciatory Ramanandis refuse to accept ‘imperfect’ food from one another). Finally a sect may identify itself with reference to a tutelary deity, but rival sects may worship the same deity. It is, of course, true that rival sects may be known to worship different forms of the same deity (Vallabhites worship Krishna as Nath Ji; Nimbarkis worship the adolescent Krishna with Radha as the Yugal Sarkar), but different forms of the deity may also be worshipped within the sect (the devotional Ramanandis worship Ram and Sita; the renunciatory Ramanandis worship the *śālagrām* as a manifestation of Vishnu Narayan). Moreover, sect members may even individually worship a variety of deities. The Dasnami Sannyasis, for example, are known as Saivite yet their members may personally worship such Vaishnavite gods as Ram and Krishna. In sum, various insignia, ritual practices, and forms of customary behaviour signify the negation of different forms of transience and thereby establish differences between groups of ascetics, but the differences so established are not discretely identified with any particular sect. In other words, negation cannot provide a discrete means of distinguishing between persons all of whom regard themselves as negators.

In seeking to understand the basis of the individual identity of a sect, one fact of primary importance comes to mind: each sect claims to have its own founder who discovered and preached a universal message of liberation from transience, a message which is still preached by the founder’s followers. Since all sectarian founders are credited with having discovered a liberating message, such a discovery by itself does not serve to differentiate sects. Differentiation occurs with the further claim that this discovery was a unique and unrepeatable event in the course of transient existence. By crediting the sectarian founder with having discovered a unique path of liberation, the sect becomes autonomous both with respect to durational time (the founder has liberated himself from transience) and with respect to rival sectarian founders (the founder’s discovery is unique).

One might illustrate the way in which ascetics combine a universal claim with a unique claim by referring to the ‘conquest of the universe’, a spiritual journey attributed to many sectarian founders, such as the Buddha, Sankaracarya and Ramanand. According to this idea the founder of a sect goes on a journey whereby he encircles the Indian subcontinent, which for south Asians is a ritual model of the universe, engaging rival ascetics in verbal duels and yogic battles.



The universe is a manifestation of Brahma and the enclosure of Brahma is clearly an impossible task for any finite individual who has not already realised Brahma himself. In other words, only Brahma can encircle Brahma; hence the encirclement of the subcontinent legitimates the founder's claim of having attained Brahma. Such an experience, however, is held out for other persons as well and can serve only as a claim that the sectarian founder is autonomous with regard to transient existence, not that he is autonomous with regard to other sects. By subduing his rivals in the course of his universal conquest, the sectarian founder asserts a re-ordered relation in time between himself and his sectarian rivals. His conquest of the universe is both an everpresent and an unrepeatable event which occurs both out of time (he has realised Brahma) and in time (he has converted his rivals). In this manner the sectarian founder establishes a re-ordered relation in time among persons who claim to be outside time.<sup>12</sup>

It remains, of course, to link the sectarian founder's autonomy with the autonomy of his present-day followers. The perpetuation of this unique and universal discovery occurs in the initiation ceremony of the sect. Strictly speaking, the candidate ascetic is not initiated into the social body of the sect; instead the initiation conducts the candidate outside transient existence. The form of the initiation may vary from sect to sect. In the Ramanandi case the candidate does not become 'dead to the social world' nor does he interiorise the sacrifice in the manner of the Brahmanical *sannyāsin*. Rather he is rendered fit for liberation by establishing a personal relationship with Lord Ram, his redeeming deity. Membership in a sect is a residue of the initiation process. By virtue of the *guru*'s transmission of the unique initiatory *mantra* to his disciple a bond is formed between them which is thought to be personal, unique and irrevocable. In the course of time the disciple himself may eventually become a *guru* by initiating his own disciples in this typical manner. The bond created by the *guru*-disciple relationship forms segmentary spiritual lineages in that the present-day followers of a founder affiliate themselves by pupillary succession with the founder (Burghart 1978). Thus, the residue of the initiation ceremony of the sect perpetuates over time a genealogical link between follower and founder, yet as a ritual process the initiation replicates that everpresent message in a typical manner so that there is no duration at all. The tradition goes on and on in time by superimposing itself upon a timeless event. In this way the liberating initiation renders the ascetic of a sect autonomous with regard to transient existence and autonomous with regard to other sects.

To summarise, considerable research remains to be carried out on the various religious traditions of south Asia, yet there is at present sufficient material to indicate that two different conceptual universes are in operation—the Brahman householder's interdependent system of caste and the ascetic's temporal cycle of individual rebirths. Each universe contains a description of itself as well as the possibility of reinterpreting the terms of the other; thus one cannot on conceptual grounds at least claim that any one scheme is the more fundamental. Moreover, ideologically both models are grounded by their proponents on the everpresent and eternal reality of Brahma.<sup>13</sup> The anthropologist, seeing himself as an investigator of society, may be predisposed to organise his perceptions of Hindu society in terms of the caste and life-stage model, for this scheme is seen

by Hindus to be quite literally a 'universe' of social relations. By itself, however, such a model is inadequate for anthropological purposes because it ignores the way in which the ascetic translates his temporal preoccupations into social and physical terms. By ignoring the ascetic's point of view, the anthropologist runs the risk of overlooking the entire field of intra- and intersectarian relations as well as the different sectarian definitions of the 'real' ascetic and non-ascetic, definitions which do not in all cases accord with the Brahman householder's view of the renounceable subject and object. In sum, there is a difference which separates the temporal world of the ascetic from the organic world of the Brahman householder and no simple structuralist opposition can bridge this difference.

## NOTES

I wish to thank Audrey Cantlie and Alexander Piatigorsky for their helpful comments on an earlier draft.

<sup>1</sup> An incident recorded in the early Buddhist literature (*Mahavagga* 1. 1–6) illustrates this point. In his first sermon the Buddha preached that the ascetic path of bodily mortification was defective in method; no one who followed that path could demonstrate that he had attained highest enlightenment. At the same time the Buddha claimed that householders follow a path of bodily pleasure and that this path was also unable to overcome the suffering of transient existence. In distinction from these two 'extreme paths' the Buddha preached his 'middle path' based on the four noble truths concerning suffering and its cessation. Two points here underscore the absence of any necessary common ground upon which to analyse the relation between Brahman householder and renouncer. First, from the householder's point of view householdership is not a 'path'; by stating that householders are on a path the Buddha reinterpreted in ascetic terms the caste and life-stage model of social relations. Second, by evaluating householdership as a path which is 'extreme', the Buddha was able to class both rival ascetics and householders together under the same category of extreme path which is distinguished from the Buddha's middle path.

<sup>2</sup> Dumont stated that the ascetic quits the social world of caste. There is a sense in which this was true for the Brahmanical *saṃnyāsīn*. He lives outside the village, does not sleep for more than one night in the same place and enters the village only for the purpose of receiving cooked food in alms. The Brahmanical ascetic, however, does not negate caste, nor does his renunciation stand in any 'contradictory' relationship (Dumont 1966: 235) with caste; rather he circulates within the auspicious universe of caste by virtue of his having interiorised the means of sustaining the universe.

<sup>3</sup> In accepting a gift, the recipient also absorbs certain qualities of the donor which may devalue the reputation of the recipient. For example, Ramanandi ascetics do not accept imperfect (*kaccā*) food from householders, for they say that such food is impregnated with desire. This article ignores these important implications of the gift relationship, for they are of consequence primarily in the recipient's relationship with other potential recipients, not in his relationship with the donor.

<sup>4</sup> In spite of the normative character of the Brahmanical codes of conduct one may perceive in these texts the presence of an iconographic means of encoding social relations which provided an external but non-discursive memory of the caste and life-stage model of the universe. It would be inappropriate, therefore, to discount the Brahmanical texts on the grounds that their normative injunctions do not pertain to actual behaviour. In so far as these texts point to an iconographic depiction of the universe one may focus instead on the representations implicit in the norms. For example, it is doubtful whether all ascetics actually wandered, were content with useless things, and were united with Brahma from the moment of renunciation. The significance of this iconographic system is that in 'going forth' to Brahma the ascetic casts his lot with Brahma and in the remainder of his earthly life represents Brahma in the ritualised social universe. Circulation within the universe and indifference to material things are attributes of Brahma which the ascetic represents iconographically by his wandering life and his useless clothes.

<sup>5</sup> A somewhat similar point, but with a different line of reasoning, has been made by Heesterman (1964) and more recently by Das (1977: 46–9). The tension between Brahmans who are priestly

householders and Brahmins who are ascetics or men of knowledge is also apparent in ethnographic accounts—for a review of this material see Fuller (in press). I have relied upon Brahmanical codes of conduct, rather than ethnography, in order to modify Dumont's position using Dumont's sources.

<sup>6</sup> This analysis allows one to specify with some precision a process by which Brahmins 'absorb' the renouncer. It is interesting to note that Dumont (1966: 342) himself was aware of this procedure with reference to tantrism, where 'the rejection of asceticism expresses itself in the form of a re-acceptance of pleasure (*bhoga*), but this re-acceptance is characteristic, for the notion of the discipline (*yoga*) of liberation is retained so that the doctrine of tantra presents itself as transcending the opposition of discipline and pleasure'. In a similar way devotional ascetics claim that selfless love (*prema*) transcends both the desire (*kāma*) of householders and the renunciation (*tyāga*) of desire by the ash-smeared yogi (Hawley 1981). The fact that this procedure is practised by Brahmins with reference to both householders and ascetics as well as by ascetics with reference to both non-ascetics and other ascetics suggests that 'absorption' is as much a theoretical activity of the Brahmin as of the ascetic.

<sup>7</sup> Dumont (1966: 234) admitted that he was only able to delineate the relationship between Brahmin householder and renouncer from the available 'ideas and facts'. Dumont's dichotomy between the man-in-the-world and the individual-outside-the-world is derived from the 'idea' of the caste and life-stage model which Dumont assumed to be the fundamental idea of Hindu society (1966: 329); elsewhere he (1966: 238) presented the 'fact' that sect does not necessarily contradict caste, for they are different structures of social relations. The approach which is outlined in this essay is, *pro* Dumont, to recognise the 'fact' of the difference between caste and sect but *contra* Dumont to see another 'idea' behind the 'fact' of sect and thereby to query the absolute fundamentality of the caste and life-stage model.

<sup>8</sup> The ritual of renunciation, as described by *Manu*, is uncharacteristic of Hindu asceticism in that the candidate is neither initiated by a *guru* nor does he become a member of a sect. This classical description of renunciation still persists today in the Brahmanical attitude that renunciation is a vocation of Brahmins rather than an institution of ascetics. For the ascetic, however, an affiliation with an institution of ascetics is of fundamental importance in his religious life. I have called this institution a 'sect' purely for conventional reasons (see McLeod 1978 for valid objections to this convention). It must be born in mind that the structure of an Indian sect is different from that of a Christian sect, and Indian sects do not stand in any relation to an equivalent of a church. Instead Indian sects are religious traditions maintained by the relationship between *guru* and disciple. During the present millennia most Indian sects have seen themselves as continuities in the reproduction of eternal knowledge (*sampradāya*). More recently sects have thought of themselves as societies (*samāj*). Other ideas include followers of a path (*pantha*) and collectivities of individual renouncers (*sangha*). It is with regard to such Indian conceptions of social organisation that I use the term sect.

<sup>9</sup> Dumont (1966: 338) notes this point in passing: 'One can say that transmigration, the renouncer's imaginary transcription of the caste system, establishes the relationship between the renouncer—the individual man—and those human phantoms who remain in the world and who nourish him'. However, he did not take this imaginary transcription into account in his theory of renunciation.

<sup>10</sup> In his discussion of *bhakti* and *tantra* Dumont (1966: 341–8) notes a similar point but without reflecting on its significance, namely, that from the point of view of *bhakti* and *tantra* the distinction between Brahmin householder and renouncer may be inoperative. This is one reason why I consider Dumont's formulation to be a Brahmin's perception of renunciation; from the ascetic's point of view the elementary distinction is between ascetic and non-ascetic.

<sup>11</sup> Some sects, such as the Lingayats (Bradford in press), replicate in outline the auspicious caste and life-stage model so that among their members may be found the functional equivalent of Brahmin priest (*pañcācārya*) and world renouncer (*virakta*) mediated by the category of Brahmin (*jaṅgama*).

<sup>12</sup> This argument and the following illustration are worked out in greater detail in Burghart 1983a. It must be emphasised that very few sects were actually established by their founders. For example, it is doubtful that Ramanand ever founded the sect which bears his name; instead the sect was founded by his followers several generations after his death.

<sup>13</sup> Both Brahmins and ascetics legitimate their way of life in terms of the cosmo-moral order (*dharma*). In the case of the Brahmin *dharma* is simply order to which all men and gods are subject. In

the case of the ascetic, however, the cosmo-moral order was set in motion by a sectarian founder (e.g. the Buddha) or a tutelary deity (e.g. Krishna). Thus *dharma* for the ascetic is constituted by and transcended by a universal person. For the Brahman there can only be *dharma* or no *dharma* (*adharmā*); for the ascetic there are various *dharma*, e.g. Vaishnavite *dharma*, Saivite *dharma*, Buddhist *dharma*, Christian *dharma*. In some contexts the ascetic might see other spiritual paths as equivalent *dharma*; in other contexts he might see them as *adharmā*. Both Brahman and ascetic may legitimate their way of life by recourse to the same term of *dharma*, but their understanding of this term may be quite different.

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